

The pantomime must go on

Written by dreamkatcha on behalf of Everything Amiga. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Ocean's first foray into official WWF wrestling games was a sorrowful resounding success, if you'll pardon the oxymoron. It sold remarkably well in the run-up to Christmas 1991 reaching the top spot in the charts, so naturally and unashamedly the sequel followed in time for the frantic festive fervour of 1992.

Critical response to WrestleMania wasn't exactly complimentary to put mildly, therefore it came as no surprise when publishers, Ocean, plumped for a different developer to outsource the work to. I'd imagine an in-house production was off the table due to scheduling conflicts with other concurrent projects. That was often the case where Ocean are concerned given their consistently high volume of output.

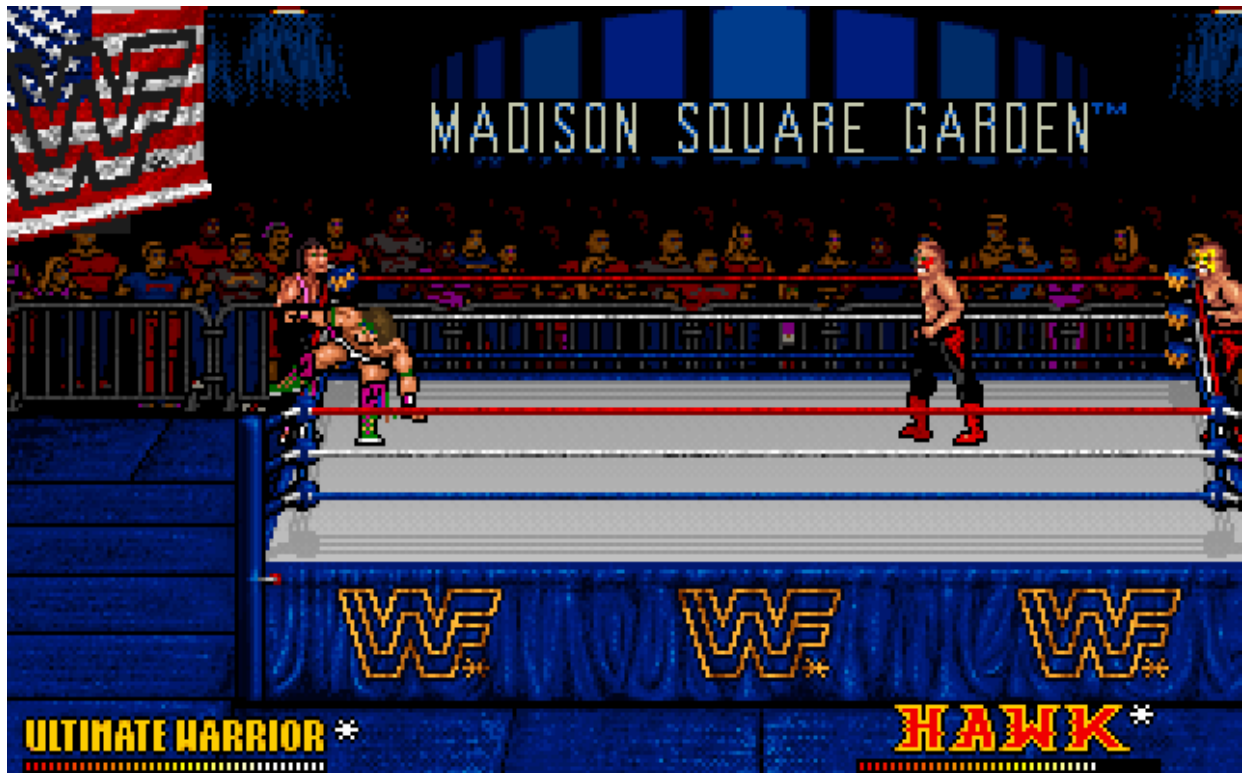
Arc Developments - who were previously known for their work on Bart vs. The Space Mutants and Forgotten Worlds - won the contract to produce WWF European Rampage Tour, and

on schedule it hit the retailers' shelves in December, where once again it was lapped up by well-meaning parents and grannies across the country.

The team of former Elite employees comprised programmer, Chris Coupe, graphic artists, Jon Harrison (intro) and Paul Walker (in-game) and musician, Andi McGinty.

I'd hazard a guess the brief would have run along the lines of: "You know how WWF1 turned out? *Don't* fall down *that* rabbit hole!"

This time round the tournament is based in Europe as with the real world event it represents (the clue's in the title), though ironically the melee culminates in a match that takes place in Madison Square Garden, which I believe is in New York if I'm not mistaken. Maybe it *used* to be in Europe, who knows?



Whereas the first game revolved around one on one skirmishes, the sequel is a tag team-centric affair. You can opt to take the role of both partners consecutively, or join forces with a friend who takes control of player two whenever the baton is passed. Unfortunately, you can't cheat when the referee's back is turned by both entering the ring simultaneously, and the computer always controls the opposing duo.

As with WrestleMania, European Rampage features a two-player practice versus mode, allowing you take on another human (or alternative real-life organism should you have one to hand), as long as player two fills the boots of The Nasty Boys. Possibly a rip in the time-space continuum would emerge should you choose to play as the same tag teams. Quagmire sidestepped, life continues.

Again we can only select to play as fighters that fall into the 'good guy' camp and the range is extremely limited. Your options are Macho Man Randy Savage, Bret 'the hitman' Hart, Ultimate Warrior and Hulk Hogan.

HULK HOGAN**

HEIGHT : 6' 8"

WEIGHT : 303 lbs

BORN : Venice Beach

FAVORITE QUOTE :

Train say your
prayers eat your
vitamins and believe
in yourself



WORLDWIDE WRESTLING FED.

Dear Lord, please can you see to it for Ocean to stop commissioning abominable wrestling games? For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

MACHO MAN RANDY SAVAGE*

HEIGHT : 6' 2"

WEIGHT : 245 lbs

BORN : Sarasota FL.

FINISHING MANEUVER:
Elbow off the
top ropes

FAVORITE QUOTE :
Oh yea!!



WORLDWIDE WRESTLING FED.

BRET 'HITMAN' HART*

HEIGHT : 6' 0"

WEIGHT : 234 lbs

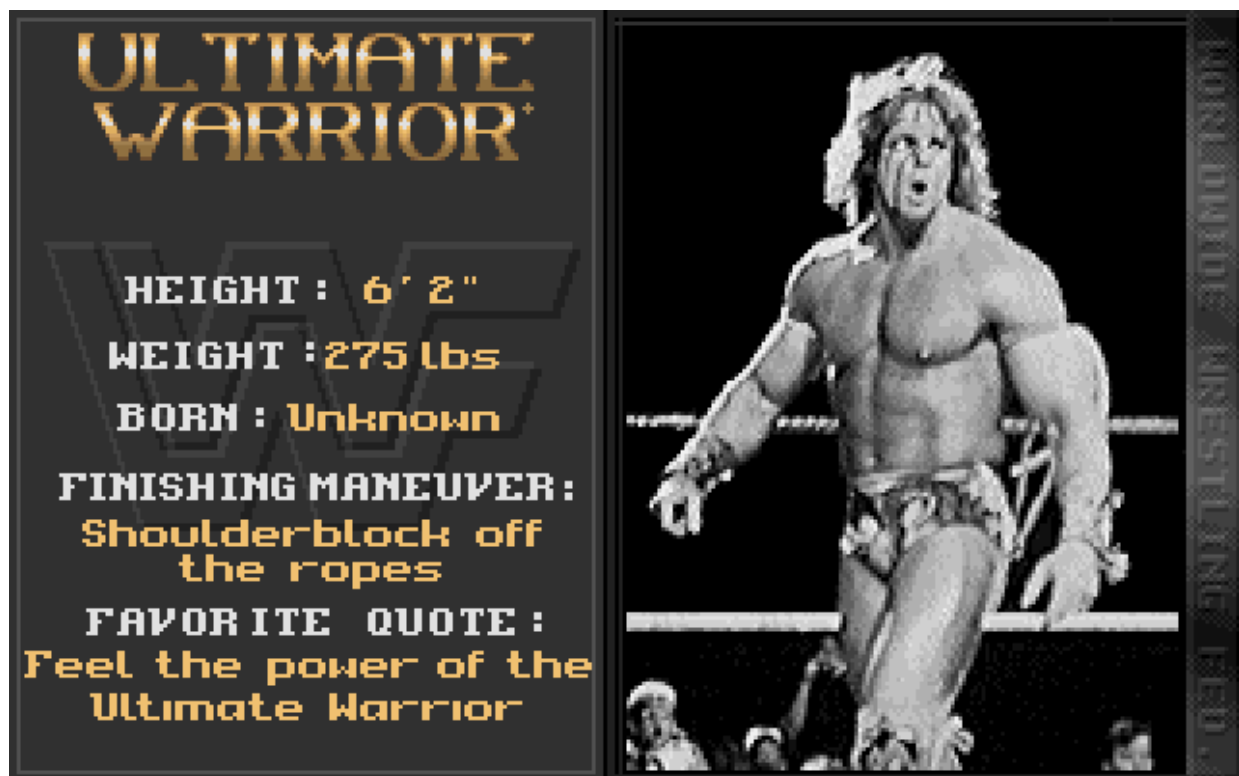
BORN : Calgary, Canada

FINISHING MANEUVER:
Sharpshooter

FAVORITE QUOTE :
I am the excellence
of execution



WORLDWIDE WRESTLING FED.



The remainder of the roster comprises the pantomime baddies, Nasty Boys, Natural Disasters, Money Inc. and ultimately, the current title holders, Legion of Doom. A prickly couple who also put in cameo appearances as disk swapping instructors, which is a neat artistic flourish I thought.



I was doing, honest! Definitely wasn't going to take out disk 1 and burn it with a blow torch or anything silly like that.

Presentation-wise the lead-in to the gameplay itself is polished to a standard even Mr Sheen would approve of. Replete with a pumping rock track, speech and digitised images of the star-studded cast, vibrant glistening metallic text and gradient effects, fact-filled bio's, and Sean Mooney's introductory TV broadcasts, Arc couldn't have set the atmospheric scene much more effectively.



Equally promising, each contender comes packaged with their own idiosyncratic theme music and digitised speech samples. Keep this up and we'll be in for the time of our lives! Ah yes, well, that's where Rampage begins to fall apart at the seams, I'm afraid. 72 disk swaps later with no external drive support, the action gets underway.

The first thing you'll notice is that the now diminutive sprites and smaller scale arena allow us to view the entire ring without the need for scrolling. Of all the things that were wrong with the original title, this certainly didn't factor into my top 100 list.



Losing a sizeable chunk of pixel real estate means they aren't so intricately detailed or recognisable as acclaimed wrestlers. That they move with all the grace and believability of Benny Hill in a time-lapse video chase sketch does little to help their cause. It's as though the animator has tried to minimise the number of frames required by only letting the wrestlers take dainty baby steps, or perhaps they've had their invisible boot laces tied together. It'll be one of the two.

And what's with the slow as molasses turning animation? You could be knocked flat on your face before you're even facing in the right direction. That's not ideal.



Hulk never could get the hang of Ralph's crane kick.

Visually it's a backwards step in general, despite having an extra half meg of RAM to cram all the assets into. The crowd remains totally static and only the spectators in the front row possess facial features and clothes - the rest merely shadowy ring-wraiths, to reduce the CPU load I suppose. We're expected to suspend our disbelief in imagining that the incessant monotone murmur that accompanies each bout emanates from the cheering fans. A shame then that it sounds more akin to radio wave interference.

Whenever you slam an opponent into the sprung canvas the screen reverberates in synchrony, which as simple a gimmick as it is, is surprisingly effective. Well, it *would* have boosted the sense of realism if the same visual and audio effect hadn't also been used to underscore pounding them into the rock-solid concrete.

Echoing WrestleMania and neutering any whiff of immersion from the outset, the small-print stars are back with a vengeance, lest we forget that we can't just go claiming ownership of any of the trademarked characters... and I'd always wanted a wickle pet wrestler of my own to wuv and cuddle and tend. Another day, another dream shattered.

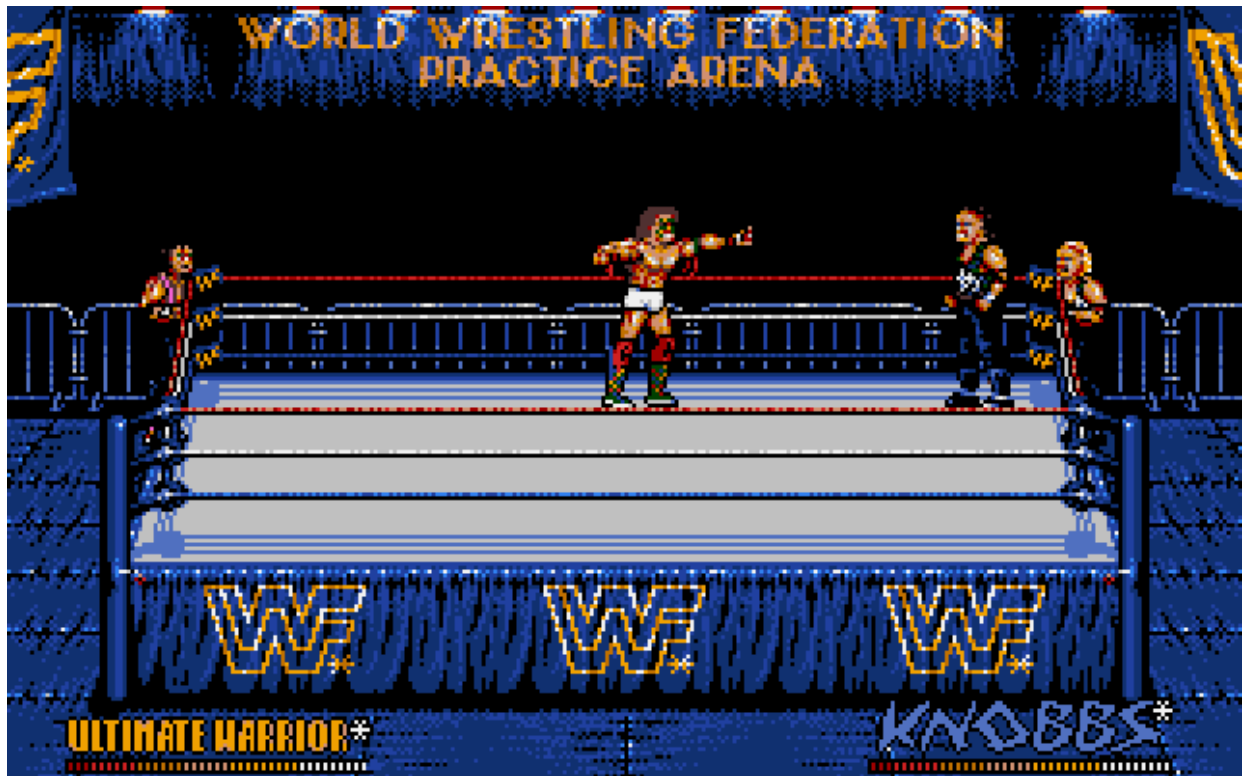


Your array of moves is more diverse than WrestleMania's, yet they're all very primitive, identical from one character to the next and no special signature moves or makeshift weapons can be deployed whatsoever. Those at your disposal include a basic punch and kick, a stomp, elbow, head cover (yes, that's a real method of 'attack'), clothesline, slap and an overhead throw.

According to the manual, the flying kick and running roll are executed using exactly the same joystick manoeuvre. No idea how that works unless it's a typo. In fact, the explanation of the control system is brimming with caveats, qualifiers and limp words such as 'try' and 'attempt' as if pre-emptively apologising for the lack of correlation between joystick commands and their outcome.

Some moves can be accomplished only if your wrestler can muster sufficient strength. If not you must wait until you've recuperated (by tagging your partner into the ring) before trying again, and as a result, it can often seem like you're

being ignored by the computer. In an existential moment, I *did* begin to wonder if I was even there.



You know you're in deep trouble when Mr Hellwig pulls off his signature 'balance on the top rope and point a bit' stunt!

Whether a move is pulled off or not is often dependent on your proximity to an opponent, so you could issue the same instruction with three different outcomes... as long as a menagerie of celestial bodies are in ascendance and align simultaneously. If not, your dumbfounded fighter could remain rooted to the spot mimicking Forest Gump attempting to wrap his grey matter around calculus.

Perhaps Arc were on the right track. You could argue this is an ingenious rubric aimed towards devising a control scheme that would be tough to harness, yet immensely satisfying when you did. Taming it would demand practice and patience, stretching the longevity of the game and therefore

your appreciation of it. The other explanation is that ERT is hopelessly broken. Take your pick.



Your goal is to deplete your adversary's energy to such an extent that they are incapable of wriggling free when you pin them to the mat. Keep them incapacitated to the count of three and you're declared the winner.

One way to accelerate this energy drain is to do more butt-kicking *outside* the ring on the hard concrete, as long as you're quick about it - any longer than 10 seconds and you'll be disqualified.

Should you find yourself chewing the canvas you'd button mash your way clear, though only if you have sufficient strength remaining to stage a comeback. Oddly enough you can pin or be pinned while lying on your stomach. I'm sure that contradicts edict 759 of the Wrestling Protocol Charter.



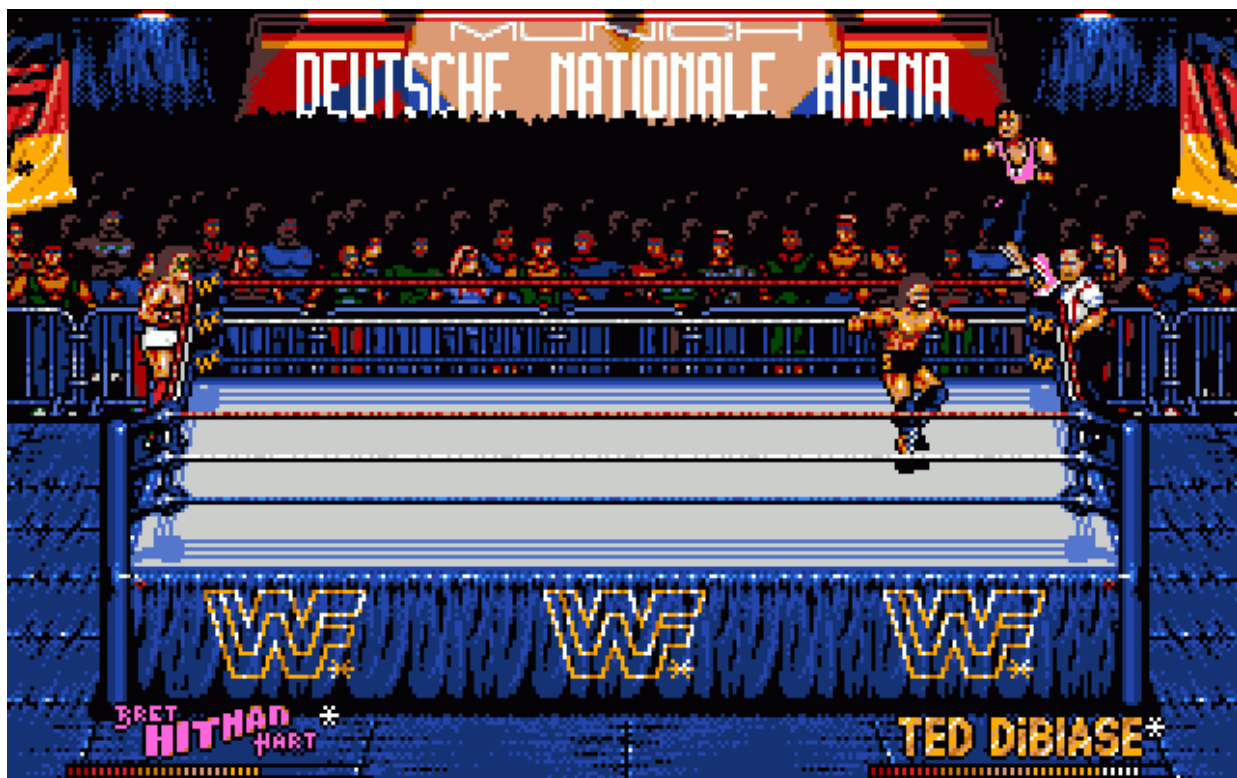
While we're making it up as we go along, if you're looking to step up the challenge you might like to try fighting *behind* the ring where you'll have no clue what you're doing or where you're doing it because the camera is fixed front and centre. Oops!

As I've learned through my own personal experience with real-life bare-knuckle street brawling, the best way to make your opponents more susceptible to throws - both in the ring and over the ropes - is to wind them three times with kicks and punches. You know, soften them up first.



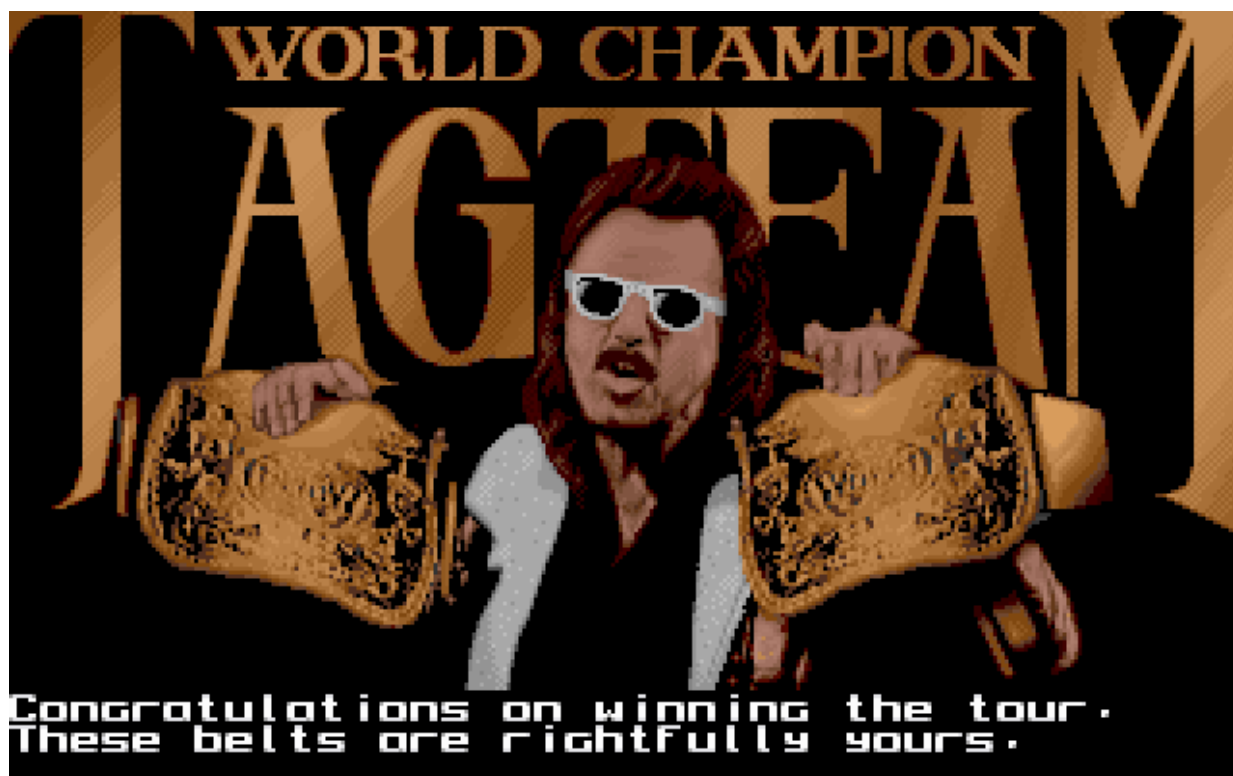
Likewise, get up close and personal and you can engage in an arm lock. This is your cue to begin hammering away on the fire button - do it quickly enough and you'll immobilise your foe with either a headlock or arm-twist gambit. Which one occurs appears to be chosen at random.

Should you prefer to keep your distance, why not launch into a flying kick from the top of the turn-buckle? Accuracy is key here - miss and you'll splat the canvas, leaving you vulnerable to counter-attack. Speaking of self-preservation, you'll also need to be wary of killer turn-buckles as it's entirely possible to knock yourself out simply by walking into one!



Pummel the Legion of Doom into submission in the final encounter in New York and you claim the championship belts; a prize bizarrely enough awarded by everyone's favourite manager, Jimmy 'The Mouth of the South' Hart, along with a plea to let him take you under his wing.

Did the referee have to make an unscheduled sharp exit, or was there a clause in the license deal insisting that Jimmy is crowbarred into the game by hook or by crook?



As gobsmackingly indigestible as this may seem, European Rampage wasn't particularly well received by our chums in Amiga magazine world.

Amiga Power in an off the wall concept review that comprised a spoof chinwag between Randy Savage, Bret Hart, Ultimate Warrior and Hulk Hogan apportioned the title a dismal score of 18%. Amiga Format must have been telekinetically fused that day because they concurred to the decimal. CU Amiga, on the other hand, lavished Rampage with a comparatively respectable 74% rating.

By this juncture, Ocean had cut loose the Spectrum and Amstrad, though *did* commission a singles-match-oriented Commodore 64 version; this was marginally better than the Amiga edition according to the critics.



Hair colour prejudice was so rife back in the '90s an audience coordinator had to be drafted in... to seat patrons like with like. Riot averted. Job's a good 'un.

In December 1993 Commodore Force declared European Rampage #61 in its 'Readers' Top 100' poll, while Commodore Format in July 1993 branded it a 'Modern Classic', allotting a rank of #42 in their 'All-Time Top 50 C64 Games' chart in November 1994.



Tell me one last time what you want for Christmas.

Nevertheless, neither publication went overboard with praise in their original assessments. Commodore Force in May 1993 arrived at a mediocre 66% bottom line, whereas Commodore Format thought it worthy of 65% in February 1993. While hardly another chart storming juggernaut, Rampage *did* reach the no. 8 spot in December 1992 (source: The One, February 1993). Even so, the recurring barrage of negative press wouldn't have gone unnoticed, thus WWF2 would be

the second and last wrestling game Ocean were involved with. In fact, it was the last wrestling game released purely for home computers until WWF With Authority! emerged in 2001 solely for the Windows platform, and that was a daft collectable card game anyway.

Which is a blessing for me because I don't think I could face playing another woeful stab at translating "all the thrills and spills of the World Wrestling Federation" to the small screen and bedroom swivel chair.

In future, I'll satisfy my blood-lust *outside* in the no-go junkyard slums of Harlem. Business as usual then.